

BOOK REVIEW

E. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, Revised and Enlarged Edition, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001.

Reviewed by David Goyne

Martin van Creveld, the eminent military historian, said of the original edition of this book, first published in 1987, that it '... is brilliant'[1], and elsewhere described its first chapter as '... written in heaven.'[2] More recently, Robert Leonhard, the American military analyst said that in *Strategy* 'Luttwak demonstrates his status as one of the greatest American military thinkers' and considers it 'A fine work that deepens the understanding of the dialectic nature of warfare and is absolutely foundational to my theory of combined-arms warfare.'[3]

Surely, having already been reviewed as glowingly as this, there is no need for a further edition or, indeed, review. Yet not so, for as Edward Luttwak says 'Once the original edition was consigned to the printers, I did not cease to study strategy and war, nor did I stop working professionally, in practical ways in the field and as an adviser. Whether from theory or practice, the original idea continued to evolve'.[4]

The core of Luttwak's understanding of war is what he describes as its 'paradoxical logic' where any action will become ultimately self-defeating. This understanding draws on Clausewitz's 'culminating point' but then extends it to be the central insight necessary to understand war. Luttwak considers that most practitioners of war come to grief because they never understand or hedge against this paradoxical logic, but continue to apply the linear logic, that is that more is better, which Luttwak considers applies in all situations other than the adversarial war or war-like setting. The arguments he advances for this concept are not easily precised and deserve to be read in Luttwak's original fluent clarity.

Luttwak follows this paradoxical logic through what he describes as the five levels and two dimensions of strategy. The five levels are the technical, the tactical, the operational, the theatre strategic and the grand strategic. All of these levels are important in their own right, but it is their interaction that is critical and must be understood. Ultimately, success at a lower level may be valueless if counteracted by irrelevance or failure at a higher level. The two dimensions are the impact of the paradoxical logic between the levels (the vertical dimension) and within each level (the horizontal dimension).

Luttwak illustrates this interaction by a series of examples based on the much anticipated, but ultimately non-existent clash of Soviet and NATO ground forces on the European Central Front. This example draws on his earlier edition and might appear dated, but is used very effectively to show the importance of examining any situation in its depth, not just at

the level that best suits the point being made. Throughout this book Luttwak repeatedly shows how this in-depth analysis debunks quick fix theories based on the proliferation of cheap, specialised wonder weapons as panaceas.

Edward Luttwak illustrates his book with relevant examples and engaging descriptions. For example he provides simply the best and clearest description of the concept of 'friction' I have ever read. Similarly his description of the interactions of nuclear deterrence clarified issues that I had sensed, but never clearly understood. This book is worthwhile reading for these minor insights alone.

The first major addition that Edward Luttwak brings to the revised edition is a discussion of 'post heroic' war, a term he coined to describe the unwillingness of modern industrial nations to engage in war if any friendly casualties are likely. This is a deeply disturbing thought for those who see force as a useful, natural and necessary adjunct to diplomacy and the exercise of power. The other major addition is a discussion of the value and place of airpower in the age of 'routine precision'. Both of these are critical issues for those who want to understand what modern war 'is', rather than what it should be. Luttwak's discussion of both issues is thoughtful, illuminating and ultimately largely convincing.

My one quibble with this book is with Luttwak's title. His real subject is 'War', not simply strategy, and he ranges fluently across this wider subject. I can only suspect that he avoided this simpler title because an earlier and more famous book has a mortgage on the word. I think Luttwak's book can stand the comparison, and will certainly be easier to read and less obscure to the average modern reader.

If I were to teach strategic studies, this book would be the text I would choose. Rather than a theory of how to conduct strategy, Edward Luttwak equips his readers with the tool set to analyse any war for themselves. If any situation is examined diligently across his five levels and two dimensions, the student can be sure that it has been considered thoroughly without the risk of leaping to simplistic conclusions. Edward Luttwak does his readers the compliment of leaving them the room to think for themselves, with his book acting as an informed, intelligent guide to the 'paradoxical' terrain of war either in the past or for the uncertain present and future. If you haven't read this book before and you are interested in understanding war, or you read it last some time ago, hunt out and read the new edition. This book's value has been extended by his revisions and continues to deserve the widest readership.

[1] M. van Creveld, *Technology and War: From 2000B.C. To The Present*, Revised and Expanded Edition, The Free Press, Macmillan Inc, New York, 1991, p. 335.

[2] M. van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, The Free Press, Macmillan Inc, New York, 1991, p. 238.

[3] R. Leonhard, *The Principles of War for the Information Age*, Presidio Press, Novato, California, 2000, p. 280.

[4] E. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, Revised and Enlarged Edition, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p. xii.